

NIGHTWATCH

Review by Jay Mallin

THE NIGHT WATCH: 25 Years of Peculiar Service, by David Atlee Phillips; Atheneum: New York, 1977; \$9.95.

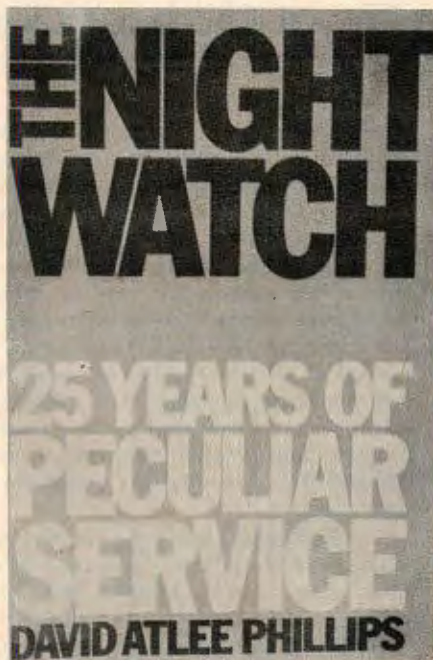
"... Every kind of service, necessary to the public good, becomes honorable by being necessary. If the exigencies of my country demand a peculiar service, its claims to perform that service are imperious."

So said Nathan Hale, the first American spy. Appropriately enough, David Phillips took part of the title of his book from this quotation, for Phillips was a direct professional descendant of Hale's. In 25 years of "peculiar service," Phillips rose from a contract worker (non-staff) for the Central Intelligence Agency to the rank and position of super-spook, in charge of all CIA operations south (and east) of the border. (Phillips points out that "peculiar" in the sense Hale used the word was defined not as "strange" but rather as "exempt from regular jurisdiction." However, both definitions seem applicable.)

There have been—especially of late—a number of books about the CIA, all presenting an "inside" (more or less) look at America's intelligence service and most of them taking *de moda* unfavorable views of the agency's work. (Phillips notes that when he decided to retire from the CIA he consulted a lecture agent regarding the possibility of taking up the lecture trail. How much could he expect to earn in a year? he asked. "I expect you can make between five and 10,000 dollars," replied the agent. "But what about speaking **against** the CIA? That way I can promise you between 50 and a 100,000 dollars the first year.")

This book is different from the others. No sensational revelations here. Phillips is too patriotic (yes, Virginia, there are still unabashed patriots in this country) and too dedicated a warrior to reveal his country's secrets for coin. And yet this book probably provides the truest picture of the personal and professional life of a U.S. intelligence agent yet published. For those who really want to know what an agent's life is like, those who really want to know how the CIA operates, this is the book to read. In fact, this is the book for anyone who wants an interesting, highly readable, even-handed non-fiction account of modern espionage.

Phillips began his career as spy in Chili in 1950, operating in a minor and part-time capacity. Three years later, he was assigned to what became one of the CIA's



most successful operations, the overthrow of the left-leaning regime of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. The downfall of the Arbenz government was accomplished almost entirely through psychwar means, the operational field in which Phillips specialized. (Ex-CIA director William Colby has aptly described Phillips as "a fine psychological warrior.")

Following the Guatemalan success, Phillips' career took him to Washington, to Lebanon, and then to Cuba, where he was present when Fulgencio Batista fled the country and Fidel Castro came to power. And if Phillips was involved in one of the CIA's major successes—Guatemala—he also participated in one of its disasters, the Bay of Pigs. The book provides no important secrets about that operation but does offer a good view of the planning and preparations that preceded the short-lived landing on Cuba's south coast.

After a stint in Mexico, Phillips had just been named COS (chief of station) for the Dominican Republic when civil war broke out in that country and President Johnson intervened with U.S. forces in order to block a Communist takeover. But rather than being in the DomRep, Phillips had to spend 3½ weeks in a "war room" ("The Pit"), handling operations from CIA headquarters. (A personal note: Danger is supposed to be part of a spy's life. It's amusing to me that while Phillips was helping to direct operations during

the Bay of Pigs and the Dominican fracas, it was handfuls of correspondents, including this writer, who were harassed, arrested, and ambushed on the scene.)

Other tours of duty followed for Phillips, and the latter part of the book deals with the controversial CIA role in Chile. Phillips makes the point that while the CIA did involve itself over a period of years in internal Chilean politics, it carefully kept out of the military coup that resulted in the downfall of the Salvador Allende government, although the CIA did know the coup was coming.

The people in this book are as interesting as the operations that are described. There are the directors of the CIA: Allen Dulles, John McCone, Adm. William Raborn, Richard Helms, James Schlesinger, and William Colby. There are the colorful characters of the CIA, ranging from James Angleton, the legendary counter-intelligence chief who was "CIA's answer to the Delphic Oracle," to Philip Agee, considered to be the CIA's first defector.

Following the Guatemala success, Phillips was sifting through documents. He relates:

A CIA analyst approached me and showed me a piece of paper. "Should we start a file on this one?" she asked.

I read the paper. It contained biographical information on a twenty-five-year-old Argentine physician who had gone into asylum in the Mexican embassy; later he was to meet and scheme with Fidel Castro in Mexico.

"I guess we'd better have a file on him," I said. Although the name meant little to me at the time, the file on Ernesto Guevara, known as "Che," eventually became one of the thickest to be maintained by the CIA.

Phillips tells of a briefing at the White House in 1954:

A door opened near me. In the darkness I could see only the silhouette of the person entering the room; when the door closed it was dark again, and I could not make out the features of the man standing next to me. He whispered a number of questions. . . .

I was vaguely uncomfortable. The questions from the unknown man next to me were insistent, furtive. . . . The lights went up. The man moved away. He was Richard Nixon, the Vice-President.

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Unfortunately, there are a number of errors of fact in the book. Phillips gives the date of Castro's historic landing in Cuba as "December of 1955" (p. 63). Actually, it occurred a year later. There were 82 not 83 expeditionaries (p. 63); there were 15 not 12 survivors (p. 64). The attack on the Presidential Palace occurred in 1957, not 1956, as Phillips implies (p. 64). Batista was in the Palace at the time the attack occurred, not somewhere else, as Phillips says (p. 64). There were, in the memory of this writer who was there at the time, no executions "before television cameras" (p. 77), although films of executions may have been telecast. Castro's "first fruitless effort to export his revolution" (p. 158) was not to the Dominican Republic but to Panama. Phillips tells a story recounted by Allen Dulles of a meeting with Lenin that Dulles missed "in Switzerland after World War I" (p. 87). Either Dulles' or Phillips' memory was faulty: Lenin had returned to Russia in April 1917, well before the war ended.

Phillips has a fine sense of humor—probably it helped him get through many of the tense moments of his career. Humor is a bright thread running through the book. Phillips tells of *Operation Penis Envy*:

One day at CIA headquarters . . . a man frantically waved me to a stop. He was clutching a memorandum in one hand.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he shouted, thrusting a paper in my face. "The greatest psychological warfare operation in history! The Soviets will never recover. Russian morale will plummet, never to be restored. The Communist system will totter!"

I read the title of the memorandum: OPERATION PENIS ENVY.

With fantastic ardor, he explained his scheme. "First, we make millions of contraceptives! Condoms!"

I was aghast. "CIA will manufacture condoms?"

"Yes," he said, eyes gleaming. "Rubbers. Millions and millions. Not just ordinary ones, but giant-sized. Immense!" He spread his hands in the gesture fishermen use to describe the one that got away.

"Rubbers four feet long?" I stammered.

"Exactly. Then we drop them all over the Soviet Union. Planes flying everywhere, from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok! We'll drop them by the millions!"

"You are totally demented," I said. "What possible good will that do?"

"Oh, it's not the rubbers." He leaned toward me, his eyes wide with enthusiasm. "It's the propaganda—it's what we will say. You

see, on each one will be printed in Russian: 'MADE IN USA. MEDIUM SIZE!'"

CIA agents are human beings. As such they have their successes and their failures. Like other government employees, they suffer the burdens of bureaucracy and they do what their superiors tell them to do, even though they may not always agree with the wisdom of those orders. The nature of their "peculiar" service—many are required to lead uncomfortable double lives—requires of them a rare dedication.

This book is the story of one such dedicated individual. It is a personal account. When revelations of CIA misdeeds brought the agency under heavy fire, Phillips decided (at considerable financial sacrifice) to leave the agency and speak out in its defense. This level-headed, frank book is a solid shot in defense of the CIA. It is a good book. Future writers looking at the role of the CIA during the past decades will have to take it into account. The exigencies of his country demanded a peculiar service, and Phillips performed this service. Writing this book has been a service to the country, too.



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